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ABSTRACT

In the past, writers have chosen stylistic devices within the parameters of the traditional grammar of style, "Grammar A," characterized by analyticity, coherence, and clarity. But many contemporary writers are creating a new grammar of style, "Grammar B," characterized by synchronicity, discontinuity, and ambiguity, which relies on such devices as unconnected verbal units, labyrinthine sentences, sentence fragments, lists, and voices presenting contradictory viewpoints. To assess readers' reactions to the different styles, 46 college students were asked to read 16 short selections--seven products of Grammar B, eight products of Grammar A, and one product of a schizophrenic mind--and to rank them according to difficulty or ease of comprehension. Results indicated that, on the whole, students felt disoriented and even threatened when reading Grammar B selections and were more baffled by some Grammar B pieces than by the schizophrenic prose. Although formlessness is threatening partly because it is unfamiliar, people's natural abhorrence of disorder causes a rejection of extreme syntactic innovations. For readers to recreate the meaning intended by the author, there must be a generous ration of the familiar to the strange. (The 16 selections rated by students are included.) (GW)

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Grammar A and Grammar B: Rhetorical Life and Death

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In the past nearly all writers have chosen stylistic devices within the parameters of mutually recognized conventions, the traditional grammar of style, "Grammar A." But many contemporary writers adopt instead devices creating a new grammar of style, "Grammar B," characterized by synchronicity, discontinuity, and ambiguity instead of analycity, coherence, and clarity. Although users of Grammar B and some scholars claim that advantages lie in this alternative style for writers, reader response shows that although small amounts of discontinuity may challenge readers, increasing disjunction disorients and finally threatens them and, indeed, threatens writers and the whole concept of rhetoric.

Rhetorical theory from that of the early Greeks to our contemporaries has been predicated on the belief that we should choose the best means available to most effectively persuade an audience or elicit its agreement in any given case, or induce consubstantiation, the identification of one person with another in terms of some common interest or principle. The means have not only to do with matter but also manner, style as well as content. Theorists have examined expository, persuasive, and literary discourse produced through the ages in order to describe, among

other rhetorical elements, the stylistic choices which promote the aims of each mode. Their assumption has been that the closer writers come to "speaking the language" of their readers the more likely they are to rouse them to action, or inculcate some moral and ethical values, or achieve whatever else may be the goal.

Metaphorically, language of the reader covers everything that goes into discourse, from ideas and style to choice of typeface and amount of white space on a page. Literally, it refers to the way words are handled and ordered. Speaking the language of the reader has in the past implied unity and coherence, continuity and order. It has meant arguments organized into the traditional five or six part scheme, novels presenting possible real-life experiences in linearly unfolding story lines, and the sharp separation of fiction from non-fiction. It has meant beginnings that are beginnings, middles that are middles, and endings that are endings. It has meant grammatically complete and integrated sentences. It has meant logically and adequately developed paragraphs, each joined, as with sentences, by transitional bridges.

Such stylistic conventions form part of the socially agreed-upon signals that are the currency of verbal exchange. They are in accord with, that is, they gratify our expectations and allow communication to take place. As a handy reference we can call these stylistic devices Grammar A, the traditional grammar of style. (Weathers 1976). The way I am using language now conforms to Grammar A.

However imperfect my effort, I am striving to order my disordered, myriad, fragmented ideas into structures that you can recognize. Other writers similarly strive to impose coherence on timeless disorder in order to communicate with others in society. Discourse produced within this tradition certainly differs stylistically, but such variations nonetheless function within accepted boundaries. We can easily distinguish one writer from another, say Henry James from Ernest Hemingway on the basis of grammatical complexity versus simplicity. Indeed, writers' styles may vary at different stages of their careers. Stephen Crane's early style with its short, choppy sentences contrasts with his later more expansive style. And, certainly, stylistic conventions differ from genre to genre: poetry from prose, for example. But these individual differences are negligible when compared to similarities, and all combine into a mutually intelligible language.

Writers, especially poets, may at times push language conventions to their limit, using extreme inversions, protracted ellipsis, dense metaphor, and the like. Still, all discourse written within traditional stylistic conventions remains coherent. It does not dissolve into meaningless disjunctive sequences of images and structures. To a large extent this is because discourse within this tradition reflects a view of reality long held by Western Civilization. This view recognizes that on the event level nature is in a state of dynamic flux, but it automatically and habitually perceives the world as an ordered, structured entity

devices sharply contrast with each other: the labyrinthine sentence on the one hand and the fragmentary sentence on the other. Both trace ancestry to Grammar A sentence structures. Long, intricately balanced sentences abound in eighteenth century writing, and sentence fragments traditionally provide sharp emphasis. But the labyrinthine sentence develops not one highly structured line of thought; it often develops multiple lines of thought in a tangle of appositives, parentheses, and digressions. And fragments, consisting of only one word or several at the most, may comprise an entire discourse. A fourth device is the list. Like the catalog from which it stems, it presents a series of items. But unlike the catalog, these items are assembled arbitrarily without explicit connection to their context and without any sense of meaningful order, much like a grocery list. A fifth device is double-voice, not in the traditional sense of a narrative voice distinct from the author's but two or more voices speaking simultaneously, presenting contradictory information or viewpoints. Often double-voice is combined with listing: two or more disjunctive columns run down a page. Other devices are the non-sequitur, mixed metaphor, and scrambling, a mixing up of sentences in unrelated sequence. To partially compensate for the overwhelming fragmentation engendered by these devices, writers rely on repetition to create a semblance of continuity. Repetition is an old rhetorical strategy, but in Grammar B it assumes new forms. For example, individual words are repeated--as many as thirty to forty times in a single paragraph; and sometimes phrases and sentences are used as refrains.

Other devices are used by contemporary writers, but these are the main ones. Some have no recognizable roots in rhetorical or grammatical conventions. Others emerge from standard devices, but have been extended and simultaneously stretched out of recognizable shape.

Some or all of these devices combine in different ways to create the effects of synchronicity and synthesis. Instead of diachronic ordering of events with a clear sense of past, present, and future in traditional discourse (even devices such as flashbacks and in medias res operate within a chronological time frame), in synchronicity events transcend time, simultaneously occupying a disconnected, timeless present. Synthesis, which is opposed to traditional discourses' emphasis on analysis, is created by randomly joining some or all the devices of Grammar B into a collage or montage. In some writers' hands this process functions as a sentence smasher. Individual sentences written in traditional grammar are cut up, shuffled, and then pasted into new sentences. In its not so extreme form, collage/montage juxtaposes larger units, that though disparate in form and content are less fragmented than smaller units patchworked by the cut and paste method. Collage/montage may create a multi-genre effect by combining snatches of poetry with fiction and expository writing. This effect is echoed on a larger level in criticism, history, and factual accounts that merge into fiction. Leslie Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel, Norman Mailer's Armies of the Night, and Truman Capote's In Cold Blood quickly come to mind.

Along with classifying the devices of Grammar B, Weathers points out their advantages to the writer: for example, crots correspond to the frangmentation and egalitarianism of contemporary experience, the labyrinthine sentence to its complexity, confusion, and verbosity, the fragmentary sentence to its isolation, lists to its lact of accepted values, double-voice to its ambivalence, repetitons to its throbbing life. These advantages are summed up as a "set of options" that give writers "a much more flexible voice, a …uch greater communication capacity, a much greater opportunity to put into effective language all the things they have to say" (Weathers 1976:2-3).[1]

At least in part this statement rings true. We can easily agree that more stylistic options allow for more flexibility. But questions arise with the claim that Grammar B enhances the writer's communicative capacity. That claim ignores the fact that effective communication is not a one-way street. There must be not only a writer but a reader too, and a meeting of their minds. Beyond codification of devices and analysis of their advantages for writers, we need to examine the crucial question of whether writers adopting Grammar B do more fully and effectively communicate what they have to say to readers.

In order to discover how average readers, not scholars, respond to Grammar B style, I distributed sixteen short fiction, prose, and poetry selections to forrty-six students in a General Semantics class. Since the course fulfills a requirement for a number of

disciplines, the class is a heterogeneous group in terms of ability and interests, intelligent but not elite readers. Seven of the selections were products of Grammar B, a number of them illustrating specific features of that grammar of style, eight products of Grammar A, and one officially in neither style since it is the product of a schizophrenic mind. The selections were labeled expository or as being from a short story, novel, or poem. The author of one selection was identified because his extremely visual poem had to be xeroxed from its printed source instead of typed. Otherwise no selections were identified by author or title. (Appendix A presents the selections with their sources, and where applicable, their Grammar B devices now identified. It also includes a brief discussion of how students ranked the selections.)

Students were asked to read, then rank the selections according to difficulty or ease of comprehension. As additional guidelines students were told they could consider their probable ease in answering questions about a selection, or paraphrasing it, or explaining its meaning to someone else. Students were also asked to indicate wherever possible as best they could why selections were difficult or easy.

In a few instances, individual students judged Grammar B selections easier to comprehend than Grammar A selections. But the bias of the students as a whole was decisively toward those written in traditional grammar and style. In fact, the students as a group proved more baffled by some Grammar B selections than

the piece of schizophrenic prose, which one might justifiably expect to be rated the most difficult to comprehend. Both Burroughs' collage/montage produced by the cut and fold method and the opening paragraph from Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," which breaks both literary and grammatical conventions, were judged more difficult.

A selection from a late Stephen Crane short story, "The Price of the Harness," garnered the most votes of the four judged easiest to comprehend, followed by a paragraph from John Steinbeck's Cannery Row. Both have fairly long, more syntactically complex sentences than the third ranked selection by Hemingway. These results are interesting especially when another selection, this one from an early Crane story, "Four Men in a Cave," is drawn into the picture. We could expect students to rate the early Crane selection and Hemingway's easier on appearance alone. Both have short, simple clauses, Hemingway's joined by frequent compounding. Indeed, as determined by the Fry readability formula, which depends upon the number of sentences and syllables per one hundred word passages, these two selections plot out at fifth grade reading level compared to eighth grade for the late Crane and Steinbeck selections.[2] But readability is more complex than simple sentences indicate. Coherence is also significant, as students overwhelmingly revealed in their comments pointing to lack of explicit connections among propositions as the chief obstacle to readability. The style of the early Crane piece is juvenile. Its sentence structure is simple. But it is also disjunctive, presenting a series of events which do not cohere

into a meaningful whole. The first paragraph of the Hemingway selection revealed the same difficulty to students although to a lesser degree.

As we might suspect, the question of coherency also emerged when students ranked Grammar B selections. Although students judged them less decisively, as revealed in cross-outs and shifted ordering, and the composite choices of the students as a whole were not sharply defined when compared to Grammar A selections, a pattern could be discerned. Again, the appearance of simplicity created by short clauses, sentences, and paragraphs was not influential. What did influence students was the extent to which their rhetorical and grammatical expectations were gratified. Hence the selection composed of fragments from Donald Barthelme's The Dead Father was judged more difficult than a list from the same novel and a labyrinthine sentence, a long intricate maze of digressions. The labyrinthine sentence, as one student remarked, could be negotiated by anyone familiar with Henry James. Also, as two students commented, subtraction of its parenthetical digressions left a meaningful core thought. This is because the base sentence does include the essential elements for grammatical completeness, and although its modificational load is indeed top heavy, modifiers are explicitly connected. Since lists are mutations of catalogs, they raise no expectations for internal grammatical relationships, only meaningful semantic relationships. Hence the Barthelme list, less arbitrary and disordered than others which could have been chosen, approaches the traditional

catalog. Its deviation lies mainly in its lacking an introductory clause to connect it to its context. Although students remarked on its being fragmented, with overall content unclear, they added that with slow, careful reading, most items fitted together and formed a picture. Such was not the case with the passage composed of fragmentary sentences. Its grammatical items tantalize, then finally frustrate with their partial completeness. Students remarked that the sentences seemed as if they should go together, but did not, so that atmosphere was created instead of meaning. The non-sequiturs of the first paragraph of Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," judged the second most difficult selection, jarred students by denying most of fiction's traditional conventions (for example, interpolated comments about italics), and fracturing some grammatical conventions (a sentence ending with "not to mention," after which one certainly expects something to be mentioned).

What these reader responses tell us in sum is that the more alienated a piece of discourse is from conventional forms, the more readers feel at best disoriented, at worst threatened. Writers in Grammar B style strip from readers any traditional expectations they bring to the reading task. Readers are set adrift in a new world in which they not only cannot assume the general shape of ideas and beliefs to be presented but cannot assume the forms in which these ideas are to be presented either.

We could say, as writers in the new style and their advocates proclaim, that such reactions are the mark of "handicapped" readers,

those who retain faith in worn-out values and language's ability to correspond to non-verbal aspects of life, and that with "sophistication," readers will escape the tyranny of the old conventions and welcome the new open forms (Klinkowitz 1975:2-3, 195). Such "sophisticated" readers will undoubtedly accept Marshall McLuhan's prediction that our next step logically (the word can only be taken ironically) will be "the by-passing of language in favor of general cosmic consciousness."

Undoubtedly it is true that a key reason why formlessness threatens readers is because they fear what is new. The psychotherapist Carl Rogers has provided us with valuable insights on the concept of threat in regard to newness of ideas. He tells us that because people need to preserve the integrity of their hard-earned, established beliefs and values in order to maintain their self-image, they refuse to consider alternatives that are threatening. Only when a reader's sense of threat is eliminated or reduced and trust established will he or she entertain alternative beliefs.[3] And only then can effective communication take place. But not only new ideas can threaten a reader, new forms can too, especially new linguistic forms which bear little relationship to familiar experience with language. In fact, in some cases manner may threaten more than matter.

This is because, if current linguists' and psychologists' investigations have any validity, formlessness violates our psychological makeup. Their findings imply (1) that human psychological organization must be so designed as to accommodate the

kinds of structures known to be universal across human languages and (2) that within people is an innate structuring device that naturally seeks to impose order on the world they perceive. In the same fundamental manner all human beings strive to order their perceptions to the end that they might make sense of the world. Although we adopt distinctive strategies in our struggle against disorder, these strategies are restricted within certain boundaries just as languages differ somewhat in their elements and order but only within certain limits. Hence we need seriously to entertain the possibility that much of what contemporary writers say are unnatural and externally conditioned and enforced forms may not be so molded. It is likely that a general human cognitive capacity underlies man's tendency to order his world, for which language serves as both medium and evidence. Although the essence of syntax is virtually unlimited freedom to create new sentences, we fashion them according to a limited and mutually understood set of syntactic rules. If a writer breaks these rules, we interpret what is said, if we can recover the conceptual structure at all, only by virtue of a reasonable guess as to what the rules would allow. If a writer says He lists facts in conjunction of what is happening, we can substitute with for of. But if a writer juxtaposes random sequences of words and phrases, we cannot recover the missing items.

Writing of this sort becomes intensely personal, almost anti-social. Although individual words are easy enough to understand, the author omits a coherent pattern of relationships. As those in

communication theory would put it, these disorganized particles give decoders a high degree of freedom in selecting the meaning in the message; the information becomes largely noise. If readers are willing and able, it is they who must do the composing: somehow assemble a string of matched beads from a jumble of strewn pebbles.

And herein lies the threat of formlessness to writers: loss of control. Readers are likely, if they impose meaning on the writer's words at all, to compose discourse in Grammar B style according to their own image, not the writer's.

This is not to say that innovative forms or formlessness have no rhetorical value. In poetry particularly, and if incoherence is limited, writers can capture readers by challenging them to assemble some pieces in a meaningful way, causing readers to become in effect active co-makers of the message rather than passive receivers. In addition, writers may have legitimate reasons for halt narrative that reveals a disordered movement toward a thesis rather than a thesis formulated, organized, and supported. And certainly disjunctive syntax corresponds to minds numbed by fear or pain provided the context makes this clear.

But there are problems involved. Too much self-conscious romanticizing of the mind's own workings and denial that anything true can be said about reality can lead to the absence of illumination about anything at all. And, extended to its logical limit, the rhetorical value of the reader as co-maker of a piece of discourse engenders its own rhetorical doom: the reader becomes maker. At

that point, of course, not only writer and reader but the whole concept of rhetoric is threatened.

Both our natural abhorrence of disorder and the conservative, stabilizing effect of writing on English grammar since at least the nineteenth century means that our minds reject extreme innovations, especially syntactic ones, but other conventional forms too. We need a generous ratio of the familiar to the strange--a significant concept in the eighteenth century rhetoric of Hugh Blair--of the known to the unknown in order for us as readers to recreate a writer's meaning. And whether readers recreate meaning or not spells the difference between the rhetorical life or death of any piece of writing.

NOTES

[1] Some other writers and scholars who welcome introduction and proliferation of the news forms and formlessness are McLuhan 1964, Fort 1971, Klinkowitz and Somer 1972, Wolfe 1973, and Klinkowitz 1975. Ironically, a number of the advocates couch their condemnation of the old and fervor for the new in unfractured syntax, coherently related and interrelated sentences and paragraphs, organized into, very often, the classical six phase organizational pattern.

[2] This readability formula, developed by Edward Fry of Rutgers University Reading Center counts the number of sentences and syllables in three randomly selected one hundred word passages from one work. The average of these counts is plotted on his readability graph, which is pre-marked for grade levels. Since only one passage per work is measured here, the grade levels indicated may not be accurate for each work according to Fry's formula. But a reading of each story in its entirety would intuitively support the difference in reading levels. Although its disjunction makes it harder to read, Crane's early prose style is characteristically more juvenile.

[3] Anatol Rapoport 1960: Part III discusses and illustrates Rogers' concepts more fully.

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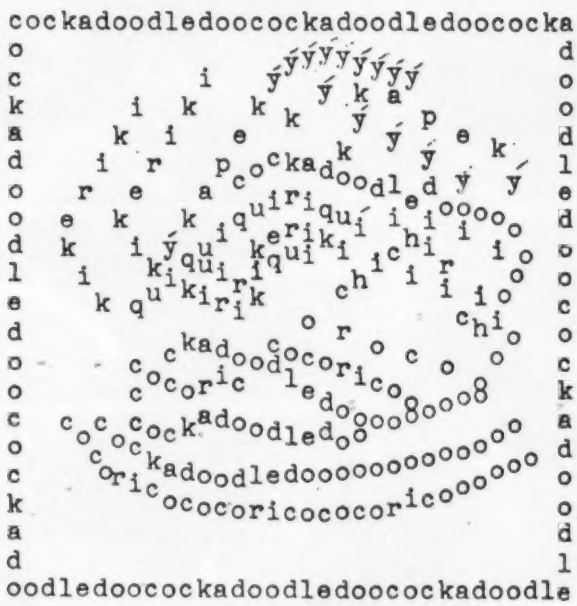
APPENDIX A

1. Poem



T. J. Kallsen
College English,
36 (April 1975), 930.

2. First paragraph of a short story. (Non-sequiturs)

For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is a place of fear and confusion. He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America. A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, which in turn is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases as well as the customary type

for titles of complete works, not to mention. Italics are also employed, in fiction-stories especially, for "out-side," intrusive, or artificial voices, such as radio announcements, the texts of telegrams and newspaper articles, et cetera. They should be used sparingly. If passages originally in roman type are italicized by someone repeating them, it's customary to acknowledge the fact. Italics mine.

John Barth, "Lost in the Funhouse."

3. From a novel. (Collage;montage)

You/left/there/naked/that young/officer/because you had not choice??????????????here/Ring those screaming fragments: : : : : : : :/"Mr. Bradley/I/here/burning/burning/rockets across the valley/whole sky burning" You call that young officer "Operation Expendable???????????

William Burroughs, A Distant Hand Lifted.

4. Expository prose. (Labyrinthine sentence)

Walt Whitman, born on Paumanok (that is: Long Island), saw in that island's shape (understandably, when you look at the map) the fish that, in the context of Western-Christian iconography, equals Christ equals rebirth equals, especially for Whitman, messianic connotations and (given Whitman's translation of biographical events and conditions into transcendental mythological patterns) therefore portends for "I, Walt Whitman" (to be born later, again, with the writing of

Leaves of Grass) a divine dimension and a capacity for illuminating the masses who, though they never read him remained always his projected audience, and revealing, to the enslaved (more than "the slaves," of course; all of us at one time or another) a certain kind of liberation, freedom, escape from the prison.

From Winston Weathers' "Grammars of Style." (No source.)

5. From a novel. (Fragmentary sentences)

Picking up of Thomas. The Dead Father pauses in mid-strum. Application of wet clothes to Thomas's forebrain. He revives. Anxiety of the onlookers. What has been foretold? Whacks of pemmican poised over open mounts in anticipation of revelation. Thomas remains silent. Anger of the men. Thomas stares at shoes. Anger of the men. Edmund lifts flask to lips. Emma appears. Thomas is startled. Who is Emma?

Donald Barthleme, The Dead Father

6. From a novel. (List)

The mountain. The cathedral. The stone steps. Music. Looking down. The windows, apertures. Rows of seated people. The altars, lights, singing. Egg-shaped apertures like seats opening onto the void. The drop. The clouds.

Donald Barthleme, The Dead Father

7. Expository prose. (Schizophrenic)

The reference to light to movement. Evolution must strive improvement. We are prisoners of our perceptivize. We are part of the flux and flow of energies with the reference of light to movement. The referent. Flowing rivers struggle to.

Scott Guinn

8. Expository prose

Then there are articles. Articles are interesting just as nouns and adjectives are not. And why are they interesting just as nouns and adjectives are not? They are interesting because they do what a noun might do if a noun was not so unfortunately the name of something. Articles please, a and an and the please as the name that follows cannot please. They the names that is the nouns cannot please, because after all you know well after all that is what Shakespeare meant when he talked about a rose by any other name.

Gertrude Stein, "Parts of Speech and Punctuation."

9. First three stanzas of a poem.

There is this other element that shines
At night near human dwellings, glows like wool
From the sides of itself, far down;

From the deep end of heated water
I am moving toward her, first swimming
Then touching my light feet to the floor,

Rising like steam from the surface
To take her in my arms, beneath the one window
Still giving off unsleeping light.

James Dickey, "The Night Pool."

10. From a short story.

The battalion moved out into the mud and began a leisurely march in the damp shade of the trees. The advance of two batteries had churned the black soil into a formidable paste. The brown leggings of the men, stained with the mud of other days, took on a deeper color. Perspiration broke gently out on the reddish faces. With his heavy roll of blanket and the half of a shelter-tent crossing his shoulder and under his left arm, each man presented the appearance of being clasped from behind, wrestler fashion, by a pair of thick white arms. There was something distinctive in the way they carried their rifles. There was the grace of an old hunter somewhere in it, the grace of a man whose rifle has become absolutely a part of himself.

Stephen Crane, "The Price of the Harness."

11. The first five paragraphs of a short story.

The moon rested for a moment in the top of a tall pine on a hill.

The little man was standing in front of the camp-fire making oration to his companions.

"We can tell a great tale when we get back to the city, if we

investigate this thing," said he, in conclusion.

They were won.

The little man was determined to explore a cave, because its black mouth had gaped at him. The four men took lighted pine-knots and clambered over boulders down a hill. In a thicket on the mountain-side lay a little tilted hole. At its side they halted.

Stephen Crane, "Four Men in a Cave."

12. Expository prose.

Byron was descended from two aristocratic families, both of them colorful, violent, and dissolute. His grandfather was an admiral known as "Foulweather Jack"; his great-uncle was the fifth Baron Byron, known to his rural neighbors as the "Wicked Lord," who was tried by his peers for killing his kinsman, William Chaworth, in a drunken duel; his father, Captain John Byron, was a rake and fortune-hunter who rapidly dissipated the patrimony of two wealthy wives. Byron's mother was a Scotswoman, Catherine Gorden of Gight, the last descendant of a line of lawless Scottish lairds. After her husband died (Byron was then 3), she brought up her son in near poverty in Aberdeen, where he was indoctrinated with the Calvinistic morality of Scottish Presbyterianism.

M. H. Abrams, ed. The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 3rd. ed.

13. From a novel.

Beyond the fields we crossed another faster-flowing stream. A sandy road led down to the ford and beyond into the woods. The path crossed the stream on another foot-log below the ford, and joined the road, and we went into the woods.

It was a beach wood and the trees were very old. Their roots bulked above the ground and the branches were twisted. We walked on the road between the thick trunks of the old beeches and the sunlight came through the leaves in light patches on the grass. The trees were big, and the foliage was thick but it was not gloomy. There was no undergrowth, only the smooth grass, very green and fresh, and the big gray trees well spaced as though it were a park.

Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises.

14. From a novel.

Colonel Cathcart wanted to be a general so desperately he was willing to try anything, even religion, and he summoned the chaplain to his office late one morning the week after he had raised the number of bombing missions to sixty and pointed abruptly down toward his desk copy of The Saturday Evening Post. The colonel wore his khaki shirt collar wide open, exposing a shadow of tough black bristles of beard on his egg-white neck, and had a spongy hanging underlip. He was a person who never tanned, and he kept out of the sun as much as possible to avoid burning. The colonel was more than a head taller than the chaplain and over twice as broad, and his swollen,

overbearing authority made the chaplain feel frail and sickly by contrast.

Joseph Heller, Catch-22

15. From a novel.

The Carmel is a lovely little river. It isn't very long but in its course it has everything a river should have. It rises in the mountains, and tumbles down a while, runs through shallows, is damned to make a lake, spills over the dam, crackles among boulders, wanders lazily under sycamores, spills into pools where trout live, drops in against banks where crayfish live. In the winter it becomes a torrent, a mean little fierce river, and in the summer it is a place for children to wade in and for fishermen to wander in. Frogs blink from its banks and the deep ferns grow beside it. Deer and foxes come to drink from it, secretly in the morning and evening, and now and then a mountain lion crouched flat laps its waters. The farms of the rich little valley back up to the river and take its water for the orchards and vegetables. The quail call beside it and the wild doves come whistling in at dusk. Raccoons pace its edges looking for frogs. It's everything a river should be.

John Steinbeck, Cannery Row.

16. Expository prose.

Perhaps the most useful of all free modifiers, and one of the easiest to master, is the appositive. It renames smoothly without requiring any change in syntactic plan. It simply appears after

(sometimes before) the word or phrase it restates, and we are involved as much in the feeling of afterthought, or of arriving clarification, as we ever are in the sense of alternate and equal possibilities. It really matters what comes first, what it names, and how it is then amplified. With appositives as with all free modifiers, and indeed with syntactic expansion in general, order and movement are more important than structure and logical relationship.

Virginia Tufte, Grammar as Style.

Discussion

Only each student's choices of the four easiest and four hardest to read selections of the sixteen were recorded. No attempt was made to record particular order except for the two selections which ranked easiest and hardest. Selection 10 cropped up more often in the easiest four (thirty-six times) than other selections. It was ranked first by fifteen people, second by five, third by five, and fourth by ten. Selection 15 was ranked second, selection 3 third, and selection 14 fourth. All are written in Grammar A. Three of the four selections rated hardest to comprehend were written in Grammar B; the fourth was written by a schizophrenic. They are in order from the most to least difficult: 3, 2, 7, and 1. Selection 3, which garnered the most points, was rated thirteenth by three students, fourteenth by seven, fifteenth by fourteen, and sixteenth by six.